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Challenges to democracy in Europe: Democracy and Disorder Podcast Series
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(MUSIC)

DEWS: Welcome the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. I'm in the Brookings Podcast studio today with Torrey Taussig, she's a non-resident Fellow in the Center on the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution, and she's here to introduce a four-part special series on the Brookings Cafeteria Podcast, Democracy and Disorder Project. Torrey, welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria.

TAUSSIG: Hi, thank you for having me Fred.

DEWS: Could you tell our listeners a little more about yourself?

TAUSSIG: Sure, I am currently a non-resident Fellow with the Center on the United States and Europe at the Foreign Policy Center at Brookings, I am based in Berlin this year as a Fellow with the Robert Bosch Foundation, but I came to Brookings a few years ago actually. First, as a pre-doctoral Fellow while I was finishing my dissertation at the Fletcher School at Tufts, and then I stayed on with Brookings as a post-doctoral Fellow. My areas of focus were on authoritarian regimes and looking at authoritarianism within Russia and China. So, this project on democracy has been actually very interesting, other side of the coin project for me to explore.

DEWS: So, tell us more about what the Democracy and Disorder project is all about.

TAUSSIG: So, the Democracy and Disorder project was started in the Foreign Policy Program about a year ago. And it was launched by the Director of the Foreign Policy Program, Bruce Jones, and myself to focus on two new realities that we see playing out in international affairs today. The first is a return to great power competition, primarily between the United States, Russia, and China. This was, enshrined, of course in the 2017 national security strategy by the Trump administration. But for a few years now, we have seen regional and global powerplays, so to speak, by Russia and China that have

attempted to remake spheres of influence, but that are also about a greater contestation about the role and influence that democracy plays in the international order. And, the second reality that this project seeks to take into account, is the challenges that democracy itself faces worldwide, and we don't need to look further than the Trans-Atlantic relationship to see a number of domestic challenges that powerful democratic states are undergoing. Of course, we have the rise of populist, and at times illiberal, governments within the European Union and within NATO. But democracy is facing more setbacks more globally, emerging and transitioning democracies as well. So, this project decided to look at these concurrent realities and understand the interplay between this newly contested arena of geopolitics and also this challenged state of democracy worldwide.

DEWS: I know that a lot of reference is made to the post-World War II era and the Western liberal order, but there's always been some contestation between the so-called West and Russia and rising China. Is there anything particularly salient or special about the challenges to democracy today that kind of necessitate this intense focus that you are bringing to the question.

TAUSSIG: Well I think from the perspective of Russia and China, at the heart of these governments' strategic objectives is to challenge the liberal, democratic model worldwide because it challenges the internal coherence of these authoritarian regimes and their legitimacy. But we have seen in recent years a more willingness to act on that, and of course there was the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia. Russia's engagement in the Middle East, on behalf of the Assad regime. And also, a more longer term subtle and gradual challenge that we are seeing from China. Of course, there's been this greater challenge within Asia and within the South China Sea that we have spoken so much about in the Foreign Policy community, but then there is the issue of China and its relatively successful authoritarian model presents the new alternative to a liberal democratic model that has reigned supreme so to speak since the end of the Cold War.

DEWS: So, walk us through, if you will, the scope of the Democracy and Disorder project. I know it involved a lot of scholars at Brookings and a lot of different topics.

TAUSSIG: The project over the last year has engaged over 30 Brookings researchers in analysis from across the Foreign Policy Program and a few from Governance Studies. And it has, in terms of scope, incorporated 26 policy briefs, that have looked at specific domestic and international dynamics behind democracy challenges, and it includes policy papers on the United States, on Europe, on Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. And each paper provides details, recommendations for preserving the role of democracy in each of these countries but also in the international order.

DEWS: In just a moment I am going to turn over the host microphone to you for the first of four in a special Brookings Cafeteria series on the Democracy and Disorder project. Can you just briefly walk us through the topics that your four episodes will cover over the next four weeks.

TAUSSIG: The first episode will look at dynamics in Europe admits the rise of populist movements across the continent and in advance of significant European Parliamentary elections coming up in May. This is of course a continent that has faced a number of shocks in recent years, culminating in the migrant crisis in 2015, which has had a significant effect on democratic governments within the European Union. So that will be the first episode. The second episode will move to looking at democracy dynamics in Asia, specifically in East Asia. As a critical region in this world for economic growth, but also a region that is home to increasing competition between the United States and China. The third episode will be a discussion on the future of democracy in the Middle East, where the Arab Spring in 2011 sparked a new conversation about the future of democracy, but also where we've seen in recent years, very sadly, a return to civil war and proxy war in the region. So, we'll discuss where debates on democracy move from there. And the final and fourth will be a conversation on democracy in India. A powerful, non-Western democracy

that plays a critical role in the Indo-Pacific region and that may be poised to take up a broader role in upholding democratic norms and institutions in the years ahead.

DEWS: And listeners will also be able to find the papers, the policy briefs on our website at [brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu), right?

TAUSSIG: Yes, [brookings.edu/democracyanddisorder](https://www.brookings.edu/democracyanddisorder).

DEWS: Just a reminder to listeners that you can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter @polycypodcasts. You can find episodes of the Brookings Cafeteria Podcast and the Democracy and Disorder special series on Apple podcasts or wherever you like to get podcasts.

And now, Torrey, the host microphone is yours.

TAUSSIG: Thank you, Fred.

My name is Torrey Taussig. I am a non-resident Fellow in the Center on the United States in Europe at Brookings and this episode on the Brookings Cafeteria Podcast is the first in a four- part episode series called Democracy and Disorder, a new project in the Foreign Policy Program that looks at critical challenges to democratic states and institutions in a new era of great power competition and offers ideas for what to do about them.

This first episode in the Democracy series focuses on democracy in Europe and I am joined in the studio today by two contributors to the projects and fellows in the Foreign Policy Program. Constanze Stelzenmüller, Robert Bosch Senior Fellow in the Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings. And Célia Belin, a Visiting Fellow in the Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings who prior to joining spent five years as an adviser on U.S. Affairs and Transatlantic Relations in the French Foreign Ministry's policy planning staff. Thank you both for being here.

So Constanze, I would like to start with you. A lot of headlines about democracy in Europe over the last few years have featured stories about the rise of populist movements

across the continent. How would you describe this populist resurgence and importantly why are we seeing it now?

STELZENMÜLLER: Well, I think my first point would be to say that there is no one size fits all populism in all of Europe. This, I have to say, kind of reminds me of the early 2000s when we used to talk about Islamism as though it were a one-size-fits-all thing and very often you will find very specific national particularities. Let me give you a couple of examples.

I think that Brexit is can be described as a domestic disagreement about how Great Britain should be governed and about how much say the periphery should have with regard to the capital, and that much of the anger about the often overbearing and resource hugging nature of London is directed at Brussels. That's not to say that Brussels doesn't make mistakes, but there is a clear element of projection here.

In Germany people tend to get really, really angry about a 10-year backlog in infrastructure investments. In France, and maybe Célia will contradict me here, but in France my sense is that there is an anger at what is seen as an overbearing national executive that is manned by a technocratic elite that is seen as remote from regular people's concerns. That said, there are of course elements of commonality across the spectrum and I think that's true not just across Europe but in the U.S. as well. And that's a sense that representative democracy as we know it is struggling under conditions of globalization and the kind of social media that seemed to be amenable to use as a daily plebiscite on the functioning of representative democracy, and also a sense that the elites that are in charge of, as it were, running the machinery of representative democracy have become remote from the concerns of normal people and that's unfortunately very easily exploitable by populists who purport to represent the majority or the silent majority, as they like to say it, or the real people and who, more often than not, it seems to me are fueled by people with extremely particular concerns and use methods that are highly manipulative.

And I would say you know blatantly undemocratic

TAUSSIG: And Célia, to follow up on this, Europe is of course undergoing a very complex movement of different types of populist parties on the right and on the left. There's also a very complex debate going on about whether economic drivers, economic grievances, among European citizens—primarily those who have been left behind in certain industries are subsets of society, as well as more cultural identity issues driven maybe in part by the 2015 migration crisis. How do you see the interplay between cultural and economic drivers of these populist movements?

BELIN: Well I do see that there are clear challenges all over Western democracies with regard to the relationship to globalization, in particular financial globalization that has increased over the past two decades. And also, another challenge, which is a crisis in identity, of feeling that Europeans don't find their place in the world. Those two elements, the economic element and the identity element that you pointed out, are key drivers behind the populist wave.

They have increased tremendously after 2008, after the major financial crisis mostly because the types of policies that were promoted to get out of the crisis, clearly driven by Germany, but also a more Nordic model of the European Union was based on austerity measures. This has been felt by some of the more [?] European countries as an impossibility to actually do policymaking, and to bridge the gap with inequalities to try to stimulate the economy again. And this powerlessness that Europeans have felt in front of this financial crisis has had ripple effect of angering the people, of having them realize that their vote did not matter, or their vote had no potential consequence.

To give a French example, you had a president in 2012, François Hollande, elected on a campaign based on the idea of stimulating the economy, on him saying that, you know, the enemy was international finance, and then arriving in power invoking responsibility to govern. He decided to go along with, you know, Brussels' criteria for fiscal

responsibility, far limiting its potential economic action. All of this has increased the frustration of the voters, not only of François Hollande but more generally of the entire political spectrum and has led to this anger brewing that we might come back on later.

Similarly, on the identity front you have had a wave of migration over the past four decades, but a clear increase in the 2010s also because of the Arab Spring. The refugees coming from civil war in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Syria. All of this has profoundly shaken European societies in ways that are debatable, but the feeling of the Europeans citizen was that there was very little they could do in terms of deciding whether or not to host these people, whether or not to open the borders. And the idea that those topics were all dealt with at the European level, at Brussels once again increased the impression of powerlessness.

So to follow up on Constanze, I think you have these two phenomenon, the phenomenon of powerlessness that is very strong—European citizens feeling powerless compared to Brussels—but also Europeans feeling powerless in the world, feeling powerless in this geopolitical world that is shifting with new neo-authoritarian powers such as Russia and China putting forward a model that seems to be working better, even if that's all an illusion. You have this impression that models with either a more authoritarian component or a more directional economic decision-making, it seems to be doing better. And the entire system of multilateralism, liberal world order on which European prosperity was based has suffered a blow. All of this makes Europeans feel powerless, also at the global level. This fuels populism, this impression of this globalization, that you cannot get a hold on, this immigration that you cannot get a hold on, this fuels immediate answers with populist parties or populist leaders that come in and offer a simplistic response and simplistic yet ambitious, and therefore people feel they might as well try something new.

TAUSSIG: And one other aspect of the populist debate in Europe that seems to get conflated is the rise in both right-wing and left-wing populist parties. And I find so much of

the attention to be focused on right-wing populist parties. What we've seen in Poland and in Hungary that at times has this illiberal or authoritarian leaning character. But as Constanze mentioned at the onset of this conversation, there is no one size fits all. And another aspect of these populist movements is that there is the rise of left populist as well. And you write in your paper for the project with Ted Reinert, "Mutations on the left for Western Europe," that we need to be focusing on these left-wing populist movement as well.

So, can you define briefly what you see is the major differences between left-wing and right-wing populist parties and perhaps some examples of what we're seeing in Europe?

BELIN: To try to understand the difference between left-wing populism and right-wing populism you have to understand the difference between the left and the right.

Schematically you, one stands for progress which is the left, and one stands for conservatism which is the right. Both of which are considered useful answers for society either because you believe in progress and the evolution of society in that direction, or because you believe in conservatism and a projection of values and systems that have worked previously. In both cases you have a crisis of progress and a crisis of conservatism.

If I may take the one that is, as you said Torrey, is more covered either by the news media but also because it provided immediate successes politically, if we take for example Donald Trump in the United States, it's right-wing populism. Right-wing populism is based on the idea that conservatism is a hard sell now because things have changed and there needs to be a return to a previous era, an era of grandeur, you know make "Make America Great Again." But also, grandeur of Britain, grandeur of France, grandeur of Germany, maybe other countries. And so, this right-wing populism is fundamentally against change and therefore against newcomers. It's anti-immigrant populism that will try to go back to

maybe Judeo-Christian society, of times past where things were just simpler and worked better.

Left-wing populism will be dealing with the crisis of progress, with this idea that, you know, before you had social progress, you had collective bargaining that used to work. And that is not working anymore. And so, you have to return to something like that, and to return to a better progress you have to do the revolution, you have to change everything, you have to explode the system. And what it means is that the techno-structure is oppressing you, the bureaucracy is oppressing you. Whatever has been working, the institutions are failing you. And so, at the heart of it wing populism is anti-elite, anti-oligarchy.

The best example of this combination today is Italy with the Five Star Movement on one side, not exactly left-wing populism because it's more of a mix but still belonging to that anti-elite, anti-oligarchy model. And the Liga with Matteo Salvini, the anti-immigrant right-wing far right, you know, party. And their coalition provides a best example of how left-wing and right-wing populism can work together but at the same time how contradictory some of their stances can be. And even if for the moment it's a coalition that is moving forward, on most, in most other cases in most other European democracies these two populisms still oppose each other.

TAUSSIG: So, let's turn to the experience that both Germany and France have had with populist movements of the sort. Of course, what takes place in France and Germany has profound implications for the European Union as being the two largest economies in continental Europe, the two largest economies in the European Union after Brexit.

So Constanze, to start with Germany, Germany's national elections in September 2017 were unique in modern German history to say the least. The far-right alternative for Germany, or AfD Party as it's known, secured over 12 percent of the vote and entered the German parliament, or the German Bundestag for the first time. So, what is the AfD, what

do they stand for and what led to the rise in their support in recent years?

STELZENMÜLLER: So, one of the things that's so remarkable about the AfD, apart from the fact that this is the first time that a hard-right party has gained entry into the Bundestag at well above the threshold level set by Germany's laws, which is 5 percent, is that it was only created in 2013. And it was created as a Eurosceptic party the thought that Germany was being exploited as the by the European currency, the Euro, and that we were having to backstop too many economic crises at the periphery of Europe. Demanding things like a Greek exit because of the Greek crisis. It really at that time it was sort of not polling at more than 5 percent or so. It did however start getting into the state legislatures. And then the refugee crisis of 2015 came along and the AfD morphed into this roaringly xenophobic party. The founders of the party were discarded, pushed out by much more hardline new leaders. And it acquired a sort of new much more hardline following in the states as well. And between 2013 and today what happened is that the AfD has secured entry into all of the 16 state legislatures. And as you say into the national legislature in 2017. It appears to be plateauing in the polls right now at around 12 percent. But that's not to say it's harmless. Not in the least. For one it has genuinely changed the nature of Germany's national debate on certain issues, and not just on immigration. The leadership is still I think very much bent on projecting a certain degree of bourgeois respectability. But the reality is that within the AfD's ranks, and particularly within the ranks of regional and of national legislature members, there are people who are genuinely close to the hard right, not to put too fine a point upon it, to neo-Nazi movements. This is true of some of the actual members. It's certainly true of many of their staffers. Which is why the German domestic intelligence agency, the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz has recently put the hard-right wing and some of the youth organizations of the AfD under formal observation, and it has suddenly gone much more quiet on social media than it was before.

Now the other thing that's important to know is that the AfD, chaotic and crass as it

may often seem in its parliamentary manifestations, has a real sort of back landscape of intellectual circles and publications that is rooted in German hard, hard-right conservative discourse of the post-war period. And in fact, the period of the war in other words in actual national socialist thinking

There is a German political philosopher of the hard right called Armin Mohler who wrote a very influential book called “Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland,” “The Conservative Revolution,” that spawned a whole generation of followers and these followers were considered fringe for decades but very quietly and very deliberately built up a series of not just discussions circle circles but publications, publishing houses and that you could describe it as something, you could describe it as the intellectual cavalry that then found its infantry in the parliamentary version of the AfD. And it turns out that that is a very, very powerful combination of forces which is I think only pretends to be directed at refugees or at a critique of German support of other European states in economic crisis. Its real declared enemy is liberal modernity and its institutional manifestations representative democracy and rules based international order.

TAUSSIG: And Germany as what we could say as the key player in Europe economically, politically, diplomatically, these domestic issues have important consequences for Europe and for the European Union. And you write in your paper for the Democracy and Disorder Project, in your paper titled, “Germany: Baffled Hegemon,” which is an excellent title, that in the last few years Germany appeared primed to take a larger role of responsibility on the continent. You said that it was primed for what we could call a quote unquote, voluntarist moment in Europe. Where do you think this sentiment, this conversation about Germany taking on a larger role in Europe stands now particularly as Germany is dealing with these internal challenges from the AfD?

STELZENMÜLLER: Well I think once one thing is for certain it's very much visible in the national debate, that the effort of dealing with the AfD, of understanding its root

causes, of trying to address the sort of genuine and legitimate concerns that caused people to vote for the AfD in protest is reducing the bandwidth that Germany's ruling elites have for addressing larger issues of foreign and security policy, European policy, and beyond that. There is I think a sense of exhaustion and of bafflement that I feel whenever I come to Berlin.

On the other hand, I think it's adding a sense of urgency, it's adding a sense of realness to the issues at hand. There is no longer a sense that these are luxury problems. There is increasingly a sense among those who make policy in Berlin that this is an existential test not just for Europe and a liberal world order but also for Germany's role in it, in whatever way you might define that. I mean, I'm always a little bit dubious about the hegemon term because while I think that it does adequately describe Germany's economic heft, its political role is, I think, a much more tentative and often uncertain, and I think which is why I ultimately chose the title of "Baffled Hegemon." I think that the Germans right now are trying to chart their course between the option of, say, being a giant Switzerland that tries to accommodate itself, that tries to not alienate any major power—whether it's from America or China—and that makes compromises with its own principles. Or whether to be more forward leaning, to be a more stalwart and a more deliberate defender of Western principles and values within Europe and beyond.

TAUSSIG: Célia, turning to France, the same year that the AfD entered the German parliament in 2017, France also held national elections. And we had Emmanuel Macron, presidential candidate, come onto the stage. He was pro-European, but he was reformist. You might call him a radical centrist. He represented this new political party En Marche, la République en Marche. And he ran rejecting traditional center left or center right parties. He of course went on to win the election, defeating the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen from the Front National.

And it seemed that in both Europe and in the United States many people breathed a

sigh of relief that you had this kind of centrist pro-European candidate in a time of a populist resurgence in Europe. And yet today we see within France kind of a significant antigovernment protest movement. The Yellow Vest, or *Gilets jaunes*. Can you talk about how we went from this kind of hopeful moment in 2017 to these internal protests today and what they mean about Macron's ability to move forward on this kind of pro-government progressive platform he set when he ran a few years ago?

BELIN: Actually, I think you're right that the election of Emmanuel Macron in 2017 was received as the hope that the world was expecting after Brexit after the election of Donald Trump. Not the whole world but a certain type of world, the transatlantic liberal sphere, let's say that was hoping that Emmanuel Macron would be the first of a second wave after the populist, the wave of the centrist, of the most reasonable politicians. But I think it was actually a sort of an illusion because Macron's election also revealed the transformation that France's party system was experimenting very, very deeply but also a symptom of a larger evolution of Western democracy party systems all over Western Europe.

And this evolution now has really taken hold. The election of Emmanuel Macron is very interesting to look at now because it reveals what the problems that were going to come up a year and a half later, in particular with the protest movement of *Gilets jaunes*, the Yellow Vests, that started three months ago and that is still going on. When Macron was elected, he was elected as you said on a platform of "radical centrism." We actually call it with Ted Reinert in our paper "extreme centrism," "the Extreme Center," which was sold as a sort of left and right mix, the politics that would be pragmatic, that would take best ideas on both sides, at the same time type of politics.

He filled in his governments with people coming from both sides, but also technocrats people coming from the field, people that would take best practices and best ideas from the field and bring them to power. This has been sold this way to the people,

but then actually in power Emmanuel Macron made the decision to stand firmly on the center right. He took that decision because during the election he had obliterated the Socialist Party and the left and that he knew that his main opposition would be coming from the center right and the right. And that was his second objective after the campaign.

He also had a particular revanchist relationship to the Socialist Party, which made him and his government probably oblivious of some of the calls coming from the left, and really not paying attention. Also, a lot of people consider that the center of gravity of French politics belong squarely in the center right. So, for all of these reasons Emmanuel Macron's government in power have sort of forgotten there to have a social leg. He was supposed to stand on those two legs, the left and the right, and he forgot to either have you know something for the rural areas like a lot of traditional Jacques Chirac type of right-wing politician would always have a word for the for the agricultures and the rural France. But he also sort of forgot the banlieue, the suburban France. He really moved on with the France that succeeds, the France of the entrepreneurs. And it's a France that has grown more and more distant from a sort of second-tier France, the France that is forgotten, the France that also squarely belongs to the diagonal of the emptiness. These places in France from the southwest of France up to the northeast of France where you have less people, you have less dynamic cities, where you have less infrastructure, less possibilities to have mobility, et cetera.

So, all of that has brewed the anger. At the same time, looking back also on his election, he had a meteor trajectory. He came in with no party, he created a party in his own name: EM, Emmanuel Macron, En Marche. There's a similarity right there. This made him very vulnerable because when he came in, he created this whole new party with people sometimes with no field experience that hasn't been elected officials you know for decades. What it created, yes it did bring a breath of fresh air, but also a year and a half into his government he had no ear to the ground. He could not see the anger brewing. He

did not hear from the mayors that things were going badly because he had no relationship, previous relationship with mayors. All of this made him blind to the situation, and for a very long time it also made him deaf completely to the situation even after the *Gilet jaunes* started, where he did not know what to do. His media trajectory of election made him very isolated in the Élysée Palace with very little relationship to actual French people.

All of that arriving to the *Gilet jaunes* movement. The *Gilet jaunes* movement is a protest movement based on protest against a limited mobility. That's why it started with the protest against a fuel tax hike. People were saying they were living further and further from the places where they worked. They had to take the car for longer distances. And yet the price of fuel continues to rise. People feel alienated from urban dynamic centers. It's a protest of lower working class either from rural France or from the Paris [?]. And these people have been mobilized mostly through social networks. It's very much a Facebook sort of protest movement.

But the important element to remember here is that the *Gilet jaunes* movement has been quite popular. It has had wide public support because there was the feeling that the Macron government was sort of isolated and not listening to France. Three months into the movement it is dying down, but it's very radical and it's still present. And Emmanuel Macron still faces all of the same challenges that he faces he faced three months ago.

TAUSSIG: I have to say looking at the photos of these protests on the streets of Paris have been truly extraordinary as well. So, it's interesting to hear that they are dying down.

So, turning to the European level again, we have European parliamentary elections coming up in May, once every five-year elections. And, Célia, you wrote in a recent article for the American interest that these elections will be for the, quote unquote, "soul of the European Union itself." So why do you see that this way? Why do you see these elections as mattering more than previous year's elections or the elections that we saw five years

ago?

BELIN: We did write this article with Giovanna De Maio, who is a Visiting Fellow at the Center on US and Europe, and who is providing an Italian perspective, because of the spats between France and Italy over most recently when France recalled its ambassador to Italy over the fact that the leader of Five Stars, Luigi Di Maio, met with some of the *Gilet jaunes* leaders, and doing so France and the government felt insulted, felt it was completely inappropriate coming from a European ally to have a partner in a coalition meet with the opposition of a big protest movement like that.

That was the that was the beginning of our thinking and of her writing, that we try to understand what was going on between France and Italy. And in the larger picture in our opinion, France and Italy are the embodiment of this major fight that is taking place in light of the European Parliamentary elections between what Macron has called the nationalist versus the progressives.

So, Emmanuel Macron tries to portray himself as the head of the progressive. He has not formally joined a group, either left-wing group or the right-wing group, he is trying to be a kingmaker in these elections. And with other liberals and other centrist parties, he's hoping to have a sort of a say in the choice of the next president of the European Parliament, in the next President of the European Commission by being this extreme center that we already talked about.

On the opposite side, you have a Salvini-Di Maio coalition in Italy that is trying to be one of the heads of the nationalist movement, those who are trying to reclaim power out away from Brussels back to the capitals. And trying to sort of unite nationalists beyond the simple country of Italy. And so, this this fight between Macron on one side and the Italian coalition on the other side is very representative of the battle that will be taking place at the end of May. And it's a battle this time that is not so much left and right, but that is very much between this extreme center and the sovereigntist populist coalition.

STELZENMÜLLER: I completely agree with everything you've said, I would just like to add two things. One is that Salvini's most important ally here is Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian leader. I would call Salvini the tribune, the doer of this of this coupling, whereas Orbán seems to see himself as the provider of the intellectual theory of the Europe of Rollback. Just to make the framing here perfectly clear this is the first moment in postwar European history where the debate in Europe is not just about whether to integrate Europe more deeply, in other words to give Brussels more competences and regulations on making decisions, or whether to expand it. That used to be the either or, and the debate was always are these things compatible or do we do them at the same time, and to what degree.

Now for the first time we have a not insignificant movement in Europe that says actually we should be rolling back this development, we should be turning back the clock to some, I think, fairly mythical golden era of nation states. And I have to say that both Salvini and Orbán have been quite explicit about their visions for Europe. And I think it's important for us to realize that this is not just about giving the nation state its proper place, but it this is an anti-democratic and anti-liberal vision of Europe and of nation states that I think is more properly described as authoritarian. And I think in the minds of some that that that propose this new vision, neofascist.

The other point I'd like to make because it's so often I think, there's a cliché in Europe, but also in the debate in the United States that the European project is somehow directed at overcoming the nation state in Europe. Now I'm not going to, I'm not going to deny that there are ultra-Federalists in Europe who want exactly that, but they are politically mostly irrelevant. These are people who are, see themselves as intellectuals, as political philosophers, but they're not actually in power anywhere. The reality is that the European project has always been an attempt at creating a fruitful tension between a functioning nation state and a degree of European cooperation that is made necessary by

the deep interrelation we have each, other politically, socially, and economically, and the insight that there are some problems that we can only solve if we address them above the national level.

I would say that the nation state in this analysis is actually doing nicely, except it's still considered by all of us as the key unit of democratic accountability. I don't know any serious European politician that wants to completely federalize Europe. But the idea that somehow the nation state has been destroyed by liberals in Europe I think is simply wrong. And I think that needs to be contradicted forcefully, because otherwise we are going to be fighting a framing that is, I think intended to be quite malignantly destructive

TAUSSIG: And Constanze to follow up on that point. Do you see the potential for some of these right-wing parties, as you mentioned, in Italy but also in Hungary, the Salvini and the Orbáns, to create a coherent front going into the elections? Or, as you mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, there really is no one size fits all to these movements and therefore the idea that you'll have a united front on the right coming into these elections, presenting a new coherent vision for Europe, is perhaps too simplistic for the right wing?

STELZENMÜLLER: I tend to think that any project that's advised by Mr. Bannon is doomed to, is doomed to failure.

TAUSSIG: Well in the United States it worked out.

STELZENMÜLLER: Well except that I think Stephen Bannon's most grandiloquent visions have not come to pass. And again, I mean Stephen Bannon's visions are anti-democratic. I think it's entirely acceptable to call them authoritarian and in some ways fascist. And that I think that an overwhelming part of the American system is attempting to fight those impulses, though I think it's also important to admit that they are there and that they are represented quite high levels.

I am, at this point, not concerned about the populist front achieving its ultimate

goal—and it's one that has been quite explicitly described by Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian prime minister—which is to attain a majority in the European Parliament and thereby have a shaping influence on the composition of the next European government, the EU Commission, I think that's not going to happen.

But European aggregate polls do predict a significant increase, in some cases a doubling, of the populist parties represented nation state by nation state—and that's how these elections are conducted—in the European Parliament and that would give them a potential blocking minority. They have a political veto. They could just clog up the works and European regulation and European decision making and that I think could already do significant damage.

Again, there are on the sort of country by country level significant differences. For example, Orbán pretends that his country is overrun by migrants which is not the case, but he wants this entire campaign to be about reducing immigration. And his, the way he articulates this has disgracefully significantly anti-Semitic overtones and in very explicit anti-Semitic overtones. While on the other hand Salvini, wants a European immigration policy, not least because so many immigrants from northern Africa and the Middle East arrive on Italian shores when they take the Mediterranean route.

TAUSSIG: And Célia final question to you on the European parliamentary elections coming up. Do you see the right-wing movements that Constanze has been discussing as being emboldened coming out of these elections?

BELIN: To follow up on Constanze's point, I think one of the major risks is not only the Constitution of the sort of blocking minority sort of a group that would work extensively to block the evolution of the European Union, but it's also the behavior of mainstream rightwing and leftwing parties with regard to these populisms.

Will they be tempted to integrate their platform, so as to boost their own popularity? We've seen that in France with the traditional right-wing party, Le Républiquein, trying to

sort of queue up Le Front Nacional platform on immigration, and doing so sort of losing its own soul and sort of losing its own way. And we've seen a wave of, you know, more moderate conservative moving on to actually Emmanuel Macron, which is probably to Macron's pleasure, away from this right-wing that is running after the far right. And we've seen this type of phenomenon in all different mainstream parties, so there's only not only a risk of a blocking minority, but there is a risk of mainstream parties really losing their own way.

At the same time there is a real need for these mainstream parties to find a new way to be innovative again. They've stand for a status quo for too long. They've stood for being at the center, protecting the order, and not maybe hearing the evolution, the increasing inequality, the increasing anger of the people. So, moving forward for mainstream parties of the left and of the right, they will have to be innovative. They will have to find a way to answer demands for more direct democracy. They will have to find a way to find answers for demands on the ecological environmental front, which they barely have done. They will have to find a way to propose two different types of economic policies very clearly of the left and of the right to give people a new choice. The feeling that their votes matter, and that they don't need to seek refuge in populism to have an actual say in politics.

TAUSSIG: And Constanze, any final point from you in these upcoming elections that Céilia have said will be for the soul of the European Union itself?

STELZENMÜLLER: I think that's true. There is very palpably in a sense for me. I've just come back from a trip to Europe that included both Germany and Warsaw. This really is about whether we can have a common project together in Europe that transcends parochial nation state interests. I'm also I have to say somewhat optimistic about this because I do think for many of us this notion of having both a national identity, maybe even a regional identity, I know exactly where my parents are rooted in and that defines

me in a way as well. And but also having a European identity at the same time, that is precious to many of us. And I don't think anyone of us wants to give this up.

I do want to make the point that there is also a German component here. You were actually, Célia was just talking about how establishment parties have reacted to the new populists in some ways by trying to adapt or trying make concessions, and that nearly brought down the Merkel government last summer when the Bavarian sister party of her Christian Democrats, who are center right, attempted what you could call an AfD-lite course all through the summer because they were terrified of losing their absolute majority, which I would really call the luxury problem these days, in the fall elections in Bavaria. They did, they were punished for this, and they are now patching up relations, and, ironically, have stabilized Merkel through this.

But Germany also has three really important state elections in the fall. All three of them and eastern Germany where the AfD polls much higher in second place, and even in one case in Saxony even in first place. So, the terrifying question for the establishment parties will be what they are willing to do in order to deal with this new political reality? And it's also worth saying that these three states that we're talking about, one of them has been ruled by Die Linke, the East German Communist Party successor party, one has been ruled by the Social Democrats, and one by the Christian Democrats. So, all three of these parties who are now establishment parties, and important popular parties, are going to have to deal with the challenge of whether they form a coalition against the AfD to rule, or whether they're willing to coalition with the AfD.

Merkel's party the CDU has absolutely formally excluded this, but there is disagreement within the regional chapters as to whether this might not be necessary. So, this is going to be an important place to look after the European elections and in some ways, there is a historical irony here because this is also the 30th anniversary year of the fall of the Wall, which started off the transformation of Europe into Europe whole and free.

And if East Germany, as it were, where people are now going onto the streets yelling “WE ARE THE PEOPLE” isn't just for wearing combat boots and wearing neo-Nazi insignia, it would be a terrible historical irony if that were the place that begins to as it were rollback the achievements of three decades of peace and stability and prosperity for all of Europe.

TAUSSIG: It's certainly going to be an interesting few months and year ahead for these parties, these ideas that both you, Célia and Constanze have mentioned. And I think you've given our listeners a very interesting and useful lens through which to understand these elections and the future trajectory of democracy in Europe going forward. So, I would like to thank you both. I can stand. I would like to thank you both. Constanze and Célia for joining us in the studio today.

STELZENMÜLLER: Thank you. And, of course, read our papers and everybody else's papers there was much more there.

BELIN: Thank you.

(MUSIC)

TAUSSIG: You can find out more about the Democracy and Disorder Project at brookings.edu/democracyanddisorder.

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Thanks for listening. I'm Torrey Taussig.